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Russia Expels U. S. Tourist as Spy

But He Says Red Guides Encouraged Pictures

By Tom Lambert
From the Herald Tribune Bureau

MOSCOW, Aug. 11.—The Soviet government today expelled from this country an American tourist, Robert C. Christner, of Sparks, Nev., on espionage charges such as it has been making for several weeks past against American visitors and officials in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Christner, advised to leave here tonight on a train for Helsinki, Finland, was obviously upset by the charges against him, which he denied to reporters. He said he had taken photographs with his camera at various places in the country and usually in the presence of Soviet tourist guides who encouraged him to do so.

Apparently, he was unaware of the Soviet attitude on security matters and highly restrictive rules about photographing and foreign literature, and also the present anti-espionage campaign, in which all foreigners are watched closely by Soviet private citizens and government agents.



Associated Press wirephoto.
Robert Christner

The Soviet Foreign Ministry

said the American embassy here that Soviet security agents had "established" that Mr. Christner made topographic maps, took pictures of military installations and hid the maps and films in a "special money belt concealed under his clothing." He was charged also with distributing anti-Soviet literature.

Mr. Christner told reporters he took some photographs of railroad stations and made caption notes for them—usually with a Russian guide speaking as background material for a poster. He said he was preparing on the history of Russian railroads. He said he also took one photograph of a freight car.

He said he gave two copies of the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune and a "New York Times" book review and review of the week sections to a Russian at Lvov who said he wanted to improve his English. The Foreign Ministry said the newspapers contained "statements hostile to the Soviet Union."

Mr. Christner denied making any topographic maps. He said he made a hasty sketch of some buildings in the Ukrainian city of Lvov to supplement photographs taken by him there while his guide was with him. He said he began wearing a money belt at Lvov after his wallet was stolen in that city. He said he carried some of his maps and caption notes in the belt.

Mr. Christner arrived in the Soviet Union on July 17, coming from Budapest, visited a number of cities in this country and had planned to leave next morning.

The Soviet Foreign Ministry said nothing to the American embassy about expelling Mr. Christner. He told reporters he was summoned this afternoon to his tourist headquarters. There an official told him he had been "suspected" of espionage and must leave the country. Mr. Christner said: "I almost died." He called the charges against him "silly."

The American Embassy in Moscow, Aug. 11.—Robert Charles Christner, the fifth American to be expelled by the Russians of any kind in their country since the plane piloted by Francis Gary Powers was shot down in 1950.

State Department officials said the Russians are planning to make a tremendous publicity show out of Mr. Christner's trial, due to begin next Wednesday.

In preparation for that, they said, the Russians are trying to convince the world that the United States is an aggressor against world peace and is heavily involved in espionage.

Yesterday Col. Edwin M. Kirton, American air attaché at Moscow, was ordered to leave. He was accused of organizing a spy apparatus and of photographing military installations. His aide, Capt. Irving T. McDonald Jr., received a warning.

State Department records show that Mr. Christner also

on his passport application that he intended to visit France, Hungary, the Soviet Union, Britain, West Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

Studied Russian
Mr. Christner studied Russian at the military language school at Monterey, Calif., and after his discharge from the Army, at the University of California at Berkeley.

He enlisted in the Army after his graduation from the University of Nevada in 1955. He was assigned to the Army Security Agency in West Germany after attending the military language school. He was employed by the Library of Congress after his further Russian studies in Berkeley.

His father, Reed Christner, is a paleontologist with the United States Geological Survey at Menlo Park, Calif.

At Sparks, Mr. Christner's mother, Mrs. Nellie Thelen, said he was traveling on an educational grant, and that he had worked in the Library of Congress as a translator of Russian and other Slavic publications.

The Library of Congress said Mr. Christner never was used as a translator. It said he was employed on a temporary basis from April 6 to June 24, 1954, as a filer and later as a reader and reference assistant.